

## Effects of Social Media on Mental Health Among Young Adults of Lahore

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**Abstract:** The increasing use of social media among young adults has prompted growing concern over its potential psychological impacts. In the urban context of Lahore, Pakistan, where social connectivity and digital media use are rapidly evolving, understanding this phenomenon is vital.

**Objectives:** To assess the effects of social media use on the mental health of young adults in Lahore, focusing on patterns of use, emotional well-being, and psychological consequences such as sleep disturbance, depression, anxiety, and suicidal ideation. **Methods:** A descriptive cross-sectional study was conducted over six weeks (April to May 2023) involving 98 young adults aged 18–35 years in Lahore. Participants were selected using non-probability convenience sampling. Data were collected using a pre-tested, self-structured questionnaire covering socio-demographic details and psychological effects of social media. Descriptive analysis was performed using SPSS version 2022. **Results:** Among participants, 86.7% acknowledged that social media affects mental health, but only 3.1% were aware of its specific impacts. A total of 66.3% reported irritability or sleeplessness due to overuse, while 72.5% believed social media highly impacted their mental health. Alarming, 62.2% admitted to frequent suicidal thoughts associated with excessive social media engagement. More than half (52%) reported feelings of depression when comparing their lives to others' online. Sleep disturbances (73.5%), emotional stress (43.9%), and loneliness (65.3%) were also prevalent. **Conclusion:** The study highlights a strong association between excessive social media use and adverse mental health outcomes in young adults in Lahore. These include psychological distress, depression, anxiety, suicidal ideation, and disrupted sleep. Interventions promoting responsible social media use, along with educational awareness programs and mental health support, are urgently needed to mitigate these risks.

**Keywords:** Social media, mental health, Young adults, Depression, Suicidal ideation, Sleep disturbances

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### Introduction

The rapid proliferation of social media platforms in recent years has transformed the social landscape, particularly among young adults. In Lahore, Pakistan, the impact of social media on mental health has garnered substantial attention as the youth increasingly engage with these platforms for communication and connection. This demographic transition is significant, as social media can serve as both a tool for social interaction and a possible contributor to mental health challenges. The consequences of this duality are particularly pronounced among emerging adults, who are navigating formative life experiences while relying heavily on digital communication methodologies (1).

Research indicates that the pervasive use of social media is correlated with a range of adverse mental health outcomes, including increased feelings of anxiety, depression, and issues related to self-esteem (2). Specifically, studies have documented that excessive time spent on social media can lead to detrimental effects on mental well-being due to factors such as online harassment, unrealistic comparisons with peers, and exposure to curated portrayals of life that can distort perceptions of reality (3). In Lahore and similar urban settings, where young adults are highly interconnected through digital devices, these influences may exacerbate existing emotional vulnerabilities and contribute to chronic stress levels (4).

Furthermore, the unique cultural context of Pakistan—characterized by traditional values juxtaposed with modern aspirations—intensifies the effects of social media. Young adults in Lahore often encounter pressures to conform to societal expectations while simultaneously being exposed to global narratives that celebrate individualism and liberal attitudes. This

dichotomy can create internal conflicts and elevate feelings of inadequacy, particularly among those who feel unable to meet the aesthetic or lifestyle norms propagated on social platforms (5). As observed in various studies, engagement with content that showcases unattainable beauty standards can lead to negative body image and self-worth among youth in Lahore, mirroring trends observed globally (6).

Additionally, the COVID-19 pandemic has further complicated the social media landscape, with lockdowns driving individuals to seek solace and connection through these platforms. While this shift has allowed for some benefits, such as enhanced communication and support networks, it has also led to heightened emotional distress. Users have reported increased feelings of isolation coupled with the fear of missing out (FOMO) as they navigate their social realities predominantly online (7). Such findings underscore the critical importance of understanding the nuanced relationship between social media use and mental health outcomes, particularly in the context of the Pakistani young adult population.

The current literature suggests that while social media may potentially serve as an effective platform for mental health promotion and peer support, the risks posed by its misuse cannot be overlooked. Therefore, ongoing research is vital to ascertain the specific impacts of social media on mental health among young adults in Lahore, reinforcing the necessity for targeted interventions and informed discussions surrounding its safe and responsible use (8).

### Methodology

This study employed a descriptive cross-sectional design to evaluate the effects of social media on the mental health of young adults in Lahore,



Pakistan. A quantitative approach was used to gather primary data from the target population. The study was conducted over six weeks, from April 1 to May 15, 2023. Given the lack of precise population data for the city of Lahore, the sample size was estimated using Cochran's formula for an unknown population. While the calculated ideal sample size was 384, due to time and resource constraints, a total of 98 participants were ultimately enrolled in the study.

A non-probability convenience sampling technique was adopted to recruit participants. The inclusion criteria required participants to be young adults aged between 18 and 35 years, of either gender, or willing to provide informed consent. Individuals with critical illnesses or those diagnosed with intellectual disability were excluded from the study to maintain data accuracy and participant safety.

Data collection was carried out using a self-structured, pre-tested questionnaire consisting of two main sections. Section I captured demographic details such as age, gender, marital status, educational level, occupation, socioeconomic status, internet availability, and frequency of social media use. Section II included statements assessing the psychological and behavioral impacts of social media on participants' mental health. The questionnaire was administered in person by the research team, who visited various locations in Lahore, explained the purpose of the study to potential participants, and obtained informed written consent. Each questionnaire was anonymized using numeric codes to ensure confidentiality.

Before the main data collection, a pilot test was conducted with 10 participants to assess the clarity and reliability of the survey instrument. No significant revisions were required following the pilot, confirming its feasibility for broader application. Ethical approval was obtained from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of New Advance College of Nursing, Lahore. Participants were assured that their data would remain confidential and be used solely for research purposes.

Data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 2022. Descriptive statistics, including frequencies and percentages, were calculated to summarize the demographic data and responses related to the mental health impact of social media.

## Results

A descriptive cross-sectional study was conducted among 98 young adults aged 18–35 years in Lahore. Table 1 presents the socio-demographic characteristics and social media usage patterns of the 98 young adult participants. The majority were aged between 18–20 years (25.51%) and 21–23 years (19.39%), with a nearly equal gender distribution (51.02%

male, 48.98% female). Most participants were single (78.57%) and from a lower socioeconomic background (48.98%). All respondents had internet access, and the most commonly used platforms included YouTube (15.31%), Instagram (14.29%), and WhatsApp (11.22%), with 28.57% using all listed platforms. Smartphones were the most frequently used device (61.22%), and 68.37% spent more than five hours daily on social media, mainly for entertainment (31.63%) and to pass time (32.65%). (Table 1).

Table 2 highlights the psychological impact of social media on the mental health of young adults. A significant majority (86.73%) believed that social media affects mental health, yet only 3.06% were aware of its actual impact. Approximately 66.33% reported feeling sleepless or bad-tempered due to excessive use, while 72.45% stated that social media had a high impact on their mental well-being. Notably, 62.24% admitted to frequent suicidal thoughts linked to overuse, and 52.04% felt depressed after viewing others' luxurious lifestyles online. Furthermore, 73.47% agreed that excessive use caused irregular sleep patterns and hindered daily responsibilities, and 43.88% felt stressed when not using social media for a day. These findings emphasize the adverse psychological consequences of prolonged social media engagement among youth.

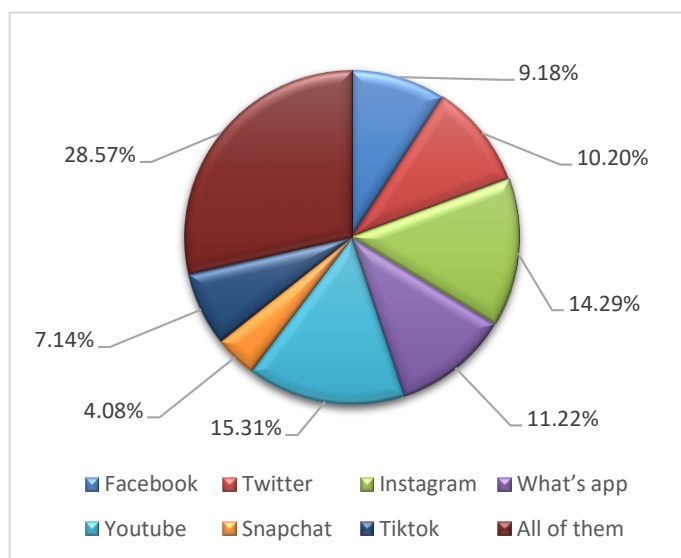


Figure 1: Status of frequently used social media sites.

Table 1: Socio-Demographic Data and Social Media Usage Characteristics (n = 98)

Variable	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
<b>Age (Years)</b>		
18–20	25	25.51
21–23	19	19.39
24–26	15	15.31
27–29	18	18.37
30–32	11	11.22
33–35	10	10.20
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	50	51.02
Female	48	48.98
<b>Marital Status</b>		
Single	77	78.57
Married	21	21.43
<b>Qualification</b>		
Illiterate	17	17.35
Primary	19	19.39
Matric/FSc/FA	18	18.37
Bachelors	23	23.47
Masters	21	21.43

<b>Profession</b>		
Student	25	25.51
Employed	22	22.45
Non-employed	23	23.47
Businessman/woman	9	9.18
Teacher	19	19.39
<b>Socioeconomic Status</b>		
Upper-class	21	21.43
Middle-class	29	29.59
Lower-class	48	48.98
<b>Internet Availability</b>		
Yes	98	100.00
No	0	0.00
<b>Frequently Used Social Media</b>		
Facebook	9	9.18
Twitter	10	10.20
Instagram	14	14.29
WhatsApp	11	11.22
YouTube	15	15.31
Snapchat	4	4.08
TikTok	7	7.14
All of them	28	28.57
<b>Device Used for Social Networking</b>		
Laptop	21	21.43
Smartphone	60	61.22
Media Tablet	9	9.18
All of them	8	8.16
<b>Time Spent on Social Media (Daily)</b>		
1 hour	2	2.04
2 hours	4	4.08
3 hours	6	6.12
4 hours	9	9.18
5 hours	10	10.20
6 hours	38	38.78
>6 hours	29	29.59
<b>Purpose of Use</b>		
Entertainment	31	31.63
Educational	15	15.31
Kill time	32	32.65
Socialize	12	12.24
Earn money	8	8.16

**Table 2: Assessment of Effects of Social Media on Mental Health (n = 98)**

Question	Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Does social media impact mental health?	Yes	85	86.73
	No	13	13.27
Knowledge of social media's impact on mental health?	Yes	3	3.06
	No	95	96.94
Felt sleepless/bad-tempered due to overuse?	Yes	65	66.33
	Sometimes	13	13.27
	Often	20	20.41
Disappointed/low seeing others' lifestyle?	Never	1	1.02
	Yes	55	56.12
	Neutral	12	12.24
	Most of the time	30	30.61
Is social media affecting mental health?	Highly affected	71	72.45
	A little bit	21	21.43
	Not at all	6	6.12
Feelings if not using social media for a whole day	Relaxed	41	41.84
	Bored	4	4.08

	Cut off from the world	6	6.12
	Stressed	43	43.88
	No effect	4	4.08
Social media use before bed	1 hour	34	34.69
	2 hours	55	56.12
	>3 hours	9	9.18
Positive impact more than negative?	Highly agree	19	19.39
	Agree	12	12.24
	Neutral	8	8.16
	Disagree	45	45.92
	Highly disagree	14	14.29
Feel unhappy and discouraged after use	Never	31	31.63
	Yes	34	34.69
	Neutral	7	7.14
	Most of the time	26	26.53
Think of death/suicide due to overuse	Never	8	8.16
	Yes	30	30.61
	Neutral	7	7.14
	Most of the time	61	62.24
Feel lonely/disconnected from people	Every time	33	33.67
	Most of the time	31	31.63
	A little bit	24	24.49
	Not at all	10	10.20
Irregular sleep/mental disorder due to excessive use	Yes	72	73.47
	No	26	26.53
False rumors affecting mental/physical health	Highly agree	50	51.02
	Agree	21	21.43
	Neutral	4	4.08
	Disagree	11	11.22
	Highly disagree	12	12.24
Feel depressed seeing luxurious lifestyles	Yes	51	52.04
	No	6	6.12
	Sometimes	29	29.59
	Often	12	12.24
Attended seminars/trainings on social media and mental health	Yes	98	100.00
	No	0	0.00

## Discussion

The results of this study concerning the impact of social media on the mental health of young adults in Lahore reveal critical insights that are congruent with existing literature on this topic. The overwhelming majority of participants, 86.73%, recognized that social media influences mental health; however, a stark contrast exists in the awareness of the actual impact, with only 3.06% acknowledging it. This disconnect indicates a potential gap in knowledge and understanding of the psychological ramifications associated with social media use, which have been widely studied and reported in various contexts (9). Such a discrepancy underscores the necessity for educational interventions geared toward enhancing awareness among young adults regarding the mental health risks linked with their digital habits.

As highlighted in the results, a significant portion (66.33%) of respondents reported feelings of sleeplessness and irritability due to overuse, reinforcing findings of previous studies that have elucidated the connections between prolonged social media exposure and psychological distress (10). The current study's finding that a substantial 72.45% of participants agree that their mental well-being is adversely affected aligns with previous work indicating that individuals often report increased feelings of anxiety and depression associated with their digital interactions (11).

Notably, the discovery that 62.24% of respondents experienced frequent suicidal thoughts linked to excessive social media use raises critical

concerns about immediate clinical implications. The notion that social media can serve as a catalyst for suicidal ideation among vulnerable populations has been echoed in the literature, with research documenting how exposure to distressing content and cyberbullying can precipitate severe psychological outcomes (12, 13). Consequently, these findings warrant the attention of mental health professionals, as they underscore the importance of monitoring young adults' social media consumption and addressing the psychological risks involved.

Additionally, the fact that 52.04% of participants felt depressed after viewing others' extravagant lifestyles on social media is emblematic of the 'compare and despair' phenomenon widely documented in psychological studies (14, 15). This may speak to a broader societal issue where social comparison is compounded by the curated nature of content appearing on social media platforms, which often depicts unrealistic benchmarks for success and happiness. The pressures of this digital scrutiny can lead to diminished self-esteem and feelings of inadequacy, particularly in an era where social media shapes much of the social landscape for young adults (16).

The reported increase in irregular sleep patterns and stress when not using media also highlights the addictive properties of social media platforms. This aspect has garnered substantial academic interest in the past few years (17, 11, 16). With 73.47% of participants asserting that excessive use disrupted their sleep and daily responsibilities, it is evident that intervention strategies addressing digital consumption habits may significantly benefit this demographic.

In summary, the findings from this study implicate the multifaceted relationship between social media use and mental health outcomes among young adults in Lahore. The ramifications of social media engagement extend beyond mere entertainment, influencing emotional states and overall psychological well-being. Therefore, stakeholders—including educators, mental health professionals, and policymakers—must prioritize developing frameworks that promote healthy social media practices while offering support to the youth confronting these modern challenges.

## Conclusion

This study provides compelling evidence of the adverse psychological effects of social media use among young adults in Lahore. The findings demonstrate a notable prevalence of symptoms including sleep irregularities, depressive mood, social comparison distress, and even suicidal thoughts. While social media offers platforms for communication and entertainment, its overuse presents significant mental health risks, particularly among digitally engaged youth. Targeted interventions—such as public awareness campaigns, digital literacy education, and accessible psychological support services—are necessary to address this growing concern. Policymakers, educators, and healthcare providers must collaborate to foster safer digital environments and promote healthier online behavior among the youth of Pakistan.

## Declarations

### Data Availability statement

All data generated or analysed during the study are included in the manuscript.

### Ethics approval and consent to participate

Approved by the department concerned. (IRBEC-24)

### Consent for publication

Approved

### Funding

Not applicable

## Conflict of interest

The authors declared the absence of a conflict of interest.

## Author Contribution

**SR** (Registered Nurse)

*Manuscript drafting, Study Design,*

**MM** (Registered Nurse)

*Review of Literature, Data entry, Data analysis, and drafting article.*

**NJ** (Registered Nurse)

*Conception of Study, Development of Research Methodology Design,*

**MS** (Principal)

*Study Design, manuscript review, critical input.*

All authors reviewed the results and approved the final version of the manuscript. They are also accountable for the integrity of the study.

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